

The Changing Relationship between the Justice and Development Party and the Kurds in Turkey

Question

Why did Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) introduce the September 2013 reforms package¹?

Importance of Question

In September of 2013 Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) announced a package of reforms, many of which were concerned with Turkey's Kurdish population by giving them more freedoms and the chance to compete politically on the national stage. The purpose of this paper is to determine what the AKP's motivations were for doing so. It is valuable to know what the reasons behind the AKP's decision were for three reasons. First, it may allow researchers to more easily predict what conditions may lead to similar reforms in the future, within Turkey specifically. Second, it provides an example of how to improve relations between a government and ethnic minority that have a long history of conflict. This example may help to solve similar issues in other countries. Third, it may clarify the goals the AKP had in mind when implementing the reforms, thereby giving insight into the desired effects of the reforms.

¹ The package included a number of reforms which gave more cultural and linguistic freedom to Kurds among other things. The reforms are explained in more detail in the background portion of the thesis

Introduction

This thesis examines the reasons behind the introduction of the September 2013 package reforms by the AKP. Research from two prior periods of reform has been compiled and analyzed to determine possible reasons for the introduction of these reforms. The first period encompasses 2002-2003 and the other 2009-10. It then examines three possible reasons for the 2013 reforms, two supported by the literature and one which is not, to determine the reasons behind the AKP's decision to introduce the aforementioned reform package.

Background

Because this paper focuses only on the reforms enacted after the AKP came to power in 2002, the background section will cover only the period between the AKP's rise to power and the present². This section will give the reader a background on three things: an overview of the AKP party, its relations with the European Union and an overview of each of the three periods of reform that will be examined.

The AKP

The story of the reforms that are being examined in this paper is also the story of the AKP. The AKP had a clear majority in parliament during every period of reform and it was their support that made these reforms possible.

The AKP's Rise to Power

The AKP was formed less than a year before the 2002 elections, bringing together a number of conservatives under the leadership of the popular former mayor of

² March 2014

Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The AKP came to power in 2002 running on a platform of Islamic values³, liberal economics and a closer association with Europe (Hurriyet, 2007). They were able to obtain an unprecedented majority in parliament even though they obtained only 35% of the popular vote and every single party that had been in parliament in the previous session was expelled because they did not pass the 10% election threshold. The Republican People's Party (CHP) was the only party in opposition at that point, but the AKP had a large enough majority that it did not need to work with the CHP (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2002).

The Evolution of the AKP's Constituency

As previously stated, the AKP was originally devoted to three main principles: conservative or Islamic values, liberal economics, and a closer association with Europe. This allowed the AKP to create a very broad coalition throughout society (Kemal, 2013), especially because of the broad level of support at the time for European integration (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2013). This support continued, not in the least because of Turkey's staggering economic growth (World Economic Forum, 2006) under Erdogan. Unfortunately once the credible commitment⁴ from the European Union disappeared, the coalition began to splinter as Erdogan and the AKP began to take a more conservative and nationalistic approach to governance (Kemal, 2013). This process has continued since and culminated with the recent protests across Turkey

³ AKP officials do not call their values Islamic, instead they assign them the term conservative democratic values (Hurriyet Daily News, 2010). For the purposes of this paper though they will be called Islamic or conservative values interchangeably.

⁴ This will be defined later in the Literature Review portion of this thesis.

against Erdogan and the laws restricting internet use passed in reaction to the protests (New York Times Editorial Board, 2014).

The AKP has traditionally had a large following amongst both Kurds and followers of the expatriate leader of the Hizmet movement, Fetullah Gulen. But the AKP has gradually been losing support amongst the Kurds in the last decade to Kurdish regional parties and independent candidates who were generally Kurds (Cengiz & Hoffmann, 2013) (Ozkirimli, 2013). The AKP has also lost the support of the Hizmet movement due to an open conflict between Fetullah Gulen and Erdogan⁵ which has been at the forefront of Turkish domestic politics in recent months (Financial Times, 2014).

Relations with the European Union

The AKP entered office promising to enact a number of reforms and bring Turkey and Europe even closer together (Kemal, 2013). They were able to successfully introduce reforms in 2002 (explained in background section) which allowed them to begin accession negotiations with the European Union in 2005, opening a number of chapters of reform⁶ (European Commission). Unfortunately, problems with the island of Cyprus⁷ halted negotiations in 2006. Turkey refused to normalize relations with Nicosia and in turn the European Commission froze eight chapters (Castle, 2006). Cyprus and

⁵ This conflict is explained further in the data analysis portion of this thesis.

⁶ There are 35 areas in which countries hoping to obtain membership must comply with European rules in order to be eligible for membership. These areas are generally referred to as chapters (European Commission).

⁷ Turkey recognizes the northern portion of Cyprus as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus but this state is not recognized by any other country and the state of Cyprus considers it to be under occupation.

France blocked additional chapters in 2009 (Famagusta Gazzete, 2013) and no additional chapters were opened until November of 2013 when the Chapter on Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments was opened (The Council of the European Union, 2013) after France unblocked it.

Reforms implemented under AKP rule

Three periods of reform have occurred since the AKP's rise to power that have specifically affected the Kurds. The first began in 2002 and ended in 2003 and focused on removing abusive terrorism laws and promoting linguistic rights. The second period encompassed 2009-2010 and was named the "Kurdish Opening". This period of reform focused on cultural and linguistic rights as well as the reform of anti-terror laws. The most recent period of reform was in September 2013 and it focused on electoral reforms and linguistic rights.

2002-2003 Reforms

In 2002 the Turkish government began to enact a series of reforms in order to conform to the Copenhagen political criteria⁸. These reforms included lifting emergency rule in all provinces, repealing laws dealing with terrorist propaganda, the abolition of state security courts and laws that allowed public television broadcasts in Kurdish. These reforms also removed a tool which the Turkish government had often used to jail Kurds who may have had no association with terrorist activities. Finally, it allowed Kurds to see television shows in their own language and television stations to air such shows without fear of prosecution. This series of reforms was successful and by the end

⁸ A set of criteria that states must meet in order to be considered for full membership in the European Union (European Commission).

Turkey was able to begin accession negotiations with the European Union (Cengiz & Hoffmann, 2013).

2009-2010 Reforms: The Kurdish Opening

In 2009 the Turkish government announced an initiative to grant greater rights to the Kurdish minority and reconcile with the PKK. The Turkish government began by implementing laws to decrease the penalties given to children who throw rocks at security service members as a good-will measure and allowing the Kurdish language to be taught at the university level (Today's Zaman, 2010) (Istanbul Daily News, 2010). Turkey's Interior Minister Besir Atalay also introduced a six step democratization plan including: "an independent human-rights institution, A commission to combat discrimination, parliamentary ratification of the U.N. Convention Against Torture and a national preventative mechanism, an independent body tasked with receiving and investigating accusations of torture or mistreatment by the security forces, renaming of residential areas in line with demands from locals, political parties will be free to communicate in languages other than Turkish" (Hurriyet Daily News, 2009).

Unfortunately the bulk of these reforms were never implemented because of the failure of the AKP's reconciliation plan with the PKK. The plan involved PKK fighters returning to Turkey under an amnesty, which the AKP hoped would foster peace. Instead the PKK returned acting as victors to an exuberant Kurdish populace and the outraged Turks rose against these reforms because, in their minds, terrorists were being allowed to return to Turkey as heroes. There was such a large backlash that the AKP was forced to backpedal and was not able to implement many of the reforms it originally hoped to (Captagay, "Kurdish Opening" Closed Shut, 2009).

September 2013 Reforms

In September 2013 the AKP announced a package of reforms affecting the Kurds. This package included reforms that allowed expanded use of the Turkish language including allowing cities to be called by their Kurdish names, allowing private schools to teach Turkish and making it legal to use letters of the alphabet associated with Kurdish. The AKP also intended to establish an anti-discrimination commission to investigate hate crimes and abolish the use of a nationalist oath in public schools. In addition, an order to remove the ban on the wearing of headscarves in certain situations was included. Finally, the package included electoral reforms that lowered the electoral threshold from 10%⁹ and the threshold for public financing of campaigns from 7% to 3%, both reforms that will make it easier for Kurdish and regional parties to succeed on the national stage (BBC, 2013).

Literature Review

For the purposes of this paper, only reforms that occurred during the AKP's time in power will be examined (Post 2002). There have been two periods of reform that have involved the Kurds during the AKP's time in power that are covered by the literature, one in 2002-2003 and the other in 2009. Unfortunately because there is a dearth of literature dealing with the September 2013 reforms, they are not included in the literature review but will be addressed in the Data Analysis section. The literature seems to agree that there was one determining factor which caused each period of reform. In the case of the 2002-2003 reforms, there is clear evidence showing that a credible commitment from the European Union (EU) to Turkish integration spurred the AKP into

⁹ Where it will be lowered to is not yet clear (BBC, 2013)

action. There is also a consensus that the 2009 reforms were mainly the result of domestic political factors.

Credible Commitment

There was a wide range of scholarship which pegged responsibility for the first period of reforms on a credible commitment by the EU to Turkey and Turkey's subsequent desire to meet the *acquis*¹⁰ requirements and eventually join the Union. Credible commitment can be defined as a commitment on the part of the EU apparatus and its two most influential member states, France and Germany, to the accession into the Union of Turkey¹¹. This is a credible commitment because Turkey knows that it will be supported by the two most powerful members of the Union who other members will look to when they vote and shows that the EU apparatus is also committed to working with Turkey to integrate it.

Evidence that Credible Commitment Caused Change

The contention that these reforms were made because of credible commitment is proven by data sets compiled by Cengiz and Hoffmann (2013) demonstrating a direct correlation between the European Union's commitment to Turkey's membership and reforms. Their research clearly shows a connection between a credible commitment from the European Union to Turkey's accession¹² and the rate of reforms by demonstrating that once Turkey was recognized as a candidate in 1999 the pace of reforms within Turkey increased rapidly (Cengiz and Hoffman 421).

¹⁰ "The body of law accumulated by the European Union" which a state is required to implement in order to be considered for full membership in the European Union (Collins Dictionary).

¹¹ France and Germany are widely recognized as the two most influential members of the union and the drivers behind integration (Euractiv, 2014)

Cengiz and Hoffman (2013) also point out that after the accession of Cyprus, reforms halted because the credible commitment disappeared after Cyprus began blocking Turkey's accession to the Union. This went on until 2009 when reforms were restarted in the form of the AKP's 'Kurdish Opening'¹³, but according to the authors these reforms were due to domestic political factors rather than any outside influence¹⁴. The authors also downplay some of the effects of internal actors, demonstrating the way in which fragile coalition governments from 1998-2002 were able to pass reforms. These coalition governments did so in spite of large domestic opposition because they had a credible commitment from the European Union. Once that commitment disappeared though, a political party with a strong electoral mandate to rule backed away from reforms after initially failing at them¹⁵. They demonstrate the penchant for the civilian government to pass only those specific reforms which would increase its own power at the expense of other domestic players after there was no longer a credible commitment from the EU.

These views are also echoed by Soner Cagtagay who wrote in a 2013 Op-ed that,

¹³As the first step of this initiative, 34 PKK members were officially allowed to enter Turkey from their Iraqi bases in November 2009. Kurdish nationalists celebrated this gesture as a victory against the Turkish state, thereby attracting the fury of Turkish nationalists. As a result, the government renamed the initiative 'Democratic Opening' and later 'National Unity Plan' and soon after abandoned it completely without any further actions. (Cengiz and Hoffman 424)

¹⁴The AKP lost many votes in the region to a Kurdish party due to the slow pace of reform (DTP) and wanted to regain them.

¹⁵The case referred to here is the 'Kurdish Opening'. This attempt to regain the votes of Turkish citizens in the Southeast failed spectacularly as the Kurds claimed it as a victory against the Turkish state provoking a backlash from ethnic Turkish citizens.

When Europe shows a serious commitment to Turkey, it responds by liberalizing.... Turkey will only reform itself when it believes the prospect of European Union accession is real. This explains why Mr. Erdogan's government cooled toward the idea of membership around 2005 and began to pursue blatantly illiberal policies at home, like intimidating and imprisoning journalists. (Captagay, 2013)

Captagay shows that Turkey will liberalize when there is a serious commitment from the EU and his example of Mr. Erdogan in 2005 shows that when that commitment disappears so does the drive for reform.

Kisacik (2014) points to a number of harmonization measures adopted by Turkey after beginning accession procedures, as evidence of the effect that a credible commitment can have. These reforms include allowing broadcasts in languages other than Turkish, and the use of those languages in other public spheres as well. Kisacik (2014) believes that the changes in minority rights within Turkey have been largely due to the influence of the European Union, and despite setbacks in 2005-2008, the reforms have succeeded in mobilizing Kurdish civil society¹⁶ and provided a political context for minority-majority relations in Turkey.

These authors demonstrate that Turkey tends to implement reforms that move her closer in line with European rules when a credible commitment is available from the European Union and that when that commitment disappears, the pace of reforms slows dramatically. This trend can also be seen in a number of other states that have joined the European Union since the fall of the Iron Curtain which were also required to reform in return for membership in the Union and have now become members. The effect of a

¹⁶ An op-ed from a Kurdish MP in the New York Times in 2011 shows that a Kurdish civil society has been allowed to develop and is speaking out, publishing their views and electing 36 Kurdish MP's to the Turkish parliament. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/18/opinion/18tuncel.html?_r=0 Accessed: 1/05/2014

European commitment on reforms has also been recognized both by members of the European Parliament (European Parliament External Relations, 2014) and the European Commission (European Commission, 2012) in addition to the authors mentioned above.

Globalization/Europeanization and the European Union

The literature endeavors to answer the question of whether or not these reforms were due solely or primarily to a credible commitment to the European Union. Kisacik (2013) has written about this subject and believes that though the European Union may have a large effect, a portion of the credit can be assigned to European organizations other than the EU. Kisacik (2013) draws a clear distinction between Europeanization and the effects of the EU on reforms. He defines Europeanization as the influence exerted by any number of European organizations¹⁷. His argument is that much of the progress made by these organizations is incorrectly attributed to the EU and that some of the credit for this success should be given to other intergovernmental organizations instead. Zeydanlioglu (2014) also has a similar view but approaches it from a different perspective. His writings focus on linguistic reforms specifically within Turkey, and while he does credit the European Union with playing a part in the periods of reform seen in Turkey, he says we should hesitate to award it a preeminent role. He believes that a number of changes, both within and without Turkey, made the pressure for reforms so large that the Turkish government was forced to act. In his view globalization and increased mobilization were also factors that played into forcing the government's hand.

¹⁷ The Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for example. This view is also supported by Cengiz and Hoffman.

European Union's Approach to Reforms

The view of Kisacik (2014) and Ozkirimli (2013) is that the European Union's approach to reforms is the reason for its success in encouraging them. The EU approaches this issue from the stance of individual or human rights rather than those of a minority¹⁸ or race and clearly states that it wants freedoms for the Kurds within Turkey, but does not support independence. This assuages some of the fears of many Turks and allows reforms to proceed under the framework of individual rights¹⁹. Ozkirimli (2013) shows how controversial this can be saying

It needs to be stressed, at the risk of reiteration, that any attempt at the public recognition of Kurdish identity should adopt the language of human rights and promote universal values, such as democracy, justice and equality, not the inherent value of Kurdish culture or cultural diversity in general

Ozkirimli (2013) recognizes that any attempt to promote Kurdish culture may be seen as an attack on the state of Turkey by Turkish nationalists (Ozkirimli, 2013, p. 5) and that individual human rights should be promoted above all in order to avoid conflict and better facilitate dialogue.

Another effective method of framing reforms, suggested by Noel and Bahceli (2010), is that presenting them as steps on the road to further democratization and eventual EU membership makes them easier to pass. The following passage from their article is relevant,

¹⁸ Kisacik (2014) mentions that using the term minority for Turkey's Kurdish population is distasteful for both sides. The leaders of the Turkish republic do not want to use this term since too many it would mean that the Kurds deserved more autonomy or even independence, while many Kurds consider themselves to be "co-founders" of the republic and believe that calling themselves a minority would be degrading.

¹⁹ The Commission recommended in 1998 the recognition of certain forms of cultural identity and greater tolerance of expressing that identity, provided it does not advocate separatism or terrorism (European Commission, 1998, p. 20)

In easing restrictions on the Kurds, the AKP government was on safer ground when it was able to portray its actions as advancing Turkey's human rights agenda, which is widely acknowledge[d] to be a policy imperative if EU membership requirements are to be met, and the AKP's democratic agenda as proclaimed in its programme, which (in principle) enjoys widespread support (Bahceli & Noel, 2010, p. 107).

Noel and Bahceli (2010) believe that this structure was more palatable for Turkish leaders and allowed reforms to continue apace because it allows them to say they are advancing democratization and general rights rather than rights for the Kurds specifically. The authors add that two other factors were at play in the first period of AKP reforms: a restrained military and a ceasefire from the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). According to the authors, both of these factors were relevant to the success in passing the reforms; however they do not make clear to what degree each is responsible.

Credible Commitment and Public Opinion

There is also a connection between governmental action and popular support for EU accession in Turkey according to Cengiz and Hoffman (2013). They note that there was a change in policy after the credible commitment from the EU disappeared, but Mohapatra (2011) takes this one step further. He draws a connection between popular opinion and credible commitment. He correctly points out the huge fall in public opinion concerning EU accession after there was no longer a credible commitment,²⁰ and contends that this forced the AKP to take on a more nationalistic tone. This view is also echoed by Captagy (2012). This line of reasoning leads to two conclusions. First, that a lack of credible commitment leads to a drop in public opinion and second that this drop

²⁰ 53% between 2002 and 2007 (Mohapatra, 2011, pp. 158-159)

then allows the government to halt its steps to implement reforms that may bring the country closer to meeting all membership requirements.

Domestic Politics

Kurdish Constituency

A disturbing development for the AKP has been the loss of Kurdish voters. As Noel and Bahceli (2010) point out there has always been a strong Kurdish presence within Islamist parties in Turkey and within the AKP specifically. This trend began to change though, and both Cengiz and Hoffman (2013) and Ozkirimli (2013) demonstrate that Kurds have been switching their votes to regional or ethnically based parties. In 2009, the Turkish government began the “Kurdish Opening” in an attempt to reconcile with the PKK. Although their reasons for doing so were not entirely security-based, according to Cengiz and Hoffman (2013). They contend that in 2009 Erdogan’s goal was to sway Kurdish voters into the camp of the AKP. According to them Erdogan realized that the AKP was losing its traditional Kurdish constituency, and attempted to regain their votes by reconciling with the PKK.

Data Analysis

There are a number of possible reasons for the reforms implemented by the Turkish government in September 2013; both supported and not supported by the literature written on previous periods of reforms. There is a consensus that a credible commitment from the European Union was the reason for the 2002-2003 reforms and that Erdogan’s desire to bolster his support amongst the Kurds was the main reason behind the “Kurdish Opening” in 2009. There are also a few claims that are unsupported by the literature that should be examined because they could have had an

effect. These include a desire for better relations with the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq as well as a desire for peace and reconciliation with the PKK.

Credible Commitment

Credible commitment can be a key component of successful periods of reform within Turkey, as acknowledged by many authors. As stated earlier, a credible commitment can be defined as a commitment from the European Union and her most influential member states, France and Germany, to Turkish accession. This commitment can be measured in a number of ways. First, whether or not accession negotiations were open at the time and how they were proceeding. Second, the statements and actions of the organizations and individuals that comprise the leadership of the European Union, and whether French and German leaders have made a commitment to full Turkish integration. Finally, whether or not Turkish leaders and the Turkish people were committed to working with the European Union.

Accession Negotiations

One method of determining whether there was a credible commitment from the European Union is to examine whether or not accession negotiations were open at the time. They were, in fact, not open and had been closed for over three years prior to the September of 2013 reforms (Today's Zaman, 2013). Many chapters were still also

closed at the time due to France and Cyprus blocking them and only one chapter was sure to be opened in the near future²¹.

However, the decision to open these talks in October had been made in July in the midst of the contentious Gezi Park Protests²² (Uras, 2013). The fact that the European Union was willing to agree upon opening talks in July, in the midst of these protests and in spite of the criticism of member states (Mcelroy, 2013), shows the European Union's commitment to Turkey complying more fully with European norms, though not demonstrating a clear commitment for Turkish membership.

European Union

Another way to determine whether or not there was a credible commitment is to examine the statements and actions of the European Union's leaders. The European Union was, at least nominally, committed to further integration of Turkey as shown by the following quote from the key findings page of the European Commission's Progress Report for Turkey, "It is in the interest of both the EU and Turkey that accession negotiations regain their momentum, not least to ensure the EU remains the benchmarks for reforms in Turkey" (European Commission, 2012). Captagay also agreed that the EU has remained committed to Turkish integration saying

²¹ The Chapter on Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments was set to be opened in November of 2013 after being unblocked by France (The Council of the European Union, 2013).

²² A series of protests held throughout Turkey held to protest the government of Prime Minister Erdogan. The Turkish government's response to these protests was harsh and widely criticized (Uras, 2013).

The European Union's recent progress report on Turkey's membership harshly criticized Mr. Erdogan's government. Yet, smartly, Europe has not pulled back, but moved closer. Leaders in Brussels are aware that Turkey will pivot further away if accession does not again become a reality. (Captagay, 2013)

The European Union, even though it recognizes the difficulties evident in accession, has remained committed to driving reform in Turkey because it realizes how important the integration of Turkey is to the Union and how detrimental²³ a pivot away from Europe on the part of Turkey could be for the Union.

France and Germany

France and Germany, in contrast, were not committed to the integration of Turkey into the European Union. Both powers have made it clear that they favor a close partnership between Turkey and the European Union rather than the accession of Turkey into the Union (Chislett, 2013) (Brown, 2014). The French and Germans fear the accession of a nation as large as Turkey into the Union because of its political implications. European Union voting is calculated by population and as such Turkey would have a very large say in the affairs of the Union, slightly less than Germany and more than France if it were to join (Captagay, 2013). There has also been a lot of skepticism, from the German government in particular, about Turkey's human rights record, especially in regards to its handling of the Gezi Park protests (Mcelroy, 2013). The statements and actions of the leaders of both governments show that they do support a closer association of Turkey with Europe. They also show that these same leaders do not support Turkish accession into the European Union, which is a requisite for the definition of credible commitment supplied earlier.

²³ Captagay details the possible effects of a turn away from Europe including the rolling back of democratic reforms and a Turkish pivot away from Europe and towards the Middle East (Captagay, The New York Times, 2013).

Turkish Commitment

After examining statements from Turkish officials and opinion polls within Turkey it seems unlikely that the European Union's reaction played into the AKP's decision-making process. The Turkish government's reaction to criticism from the EU over its handling of the Gezi Park protests is enlightening. The following is a quote from Turkish EU Minister Egemen Bagis, "The EU needs Turkey more than Turkey needs the EU...If we have to, we could tell them to get lost" (Dombey, Germany blocks Turkey's bid to join EU, 2013). This makes absolutely clear that there are some areas in which Turkey will not compromise in order to conform to European standards. This also reflects Turkish public opinion in some ways. Only 44% of Turks are in favor of joining the European Union, down from 73% in 2004 and 34% say that joining the European Union would be bad for Turkey, up from 7% in 2004 (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2013). These sea changes in public opinion within Turkey make it unlikely that any sort of credible commitment will elicit a major response from the Turkish government on its own.

Conclusions

The evidence points to the fact that there was not a credible commitment from the European Union at this time. There was a commitment to reform within Turkey from European leaders, and one of the accession chapters would be opened soon but many others remained closed. In addition, Germany and France had still not given credible commitments to Turkish accession, and continued to support a special partnership between the European Union and Turkey rather than full membership. The reforms were announced on September 30th (BBC, 2013), about a month before accession negotiations were set to begin again. Although there was no announcement from the

Turkish government saying that this is one of their reasons for implementing the reforms; the timing and scope of the reforms makes it possible that the Turkish government could have pointed to them as an example of democracy, and liberal government working in Turkey. Especially after the criticism the Turkish government received in the wake of the Gezi Park protests (Mcelroy, 2013).

It is very unlikely that the primary reason for implementing these reforms was a hope to join Europe. Turkey did not have a strong commitment from the European Union and had already shown its unwillingness to adhere to European standards in certain circumstances with its actions during the Gezi Park protests. Turkish leaders also had latitude to not pursue European integration because of the historically small number of Turks (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2013) pushing for membership in the Union because there was no credible commitment.

Domestic Political Considerations

Another reason for the implementation of the 2013 reforms could have been due to domestic political considerations. These considerations could include a cessation of violence or reconciliation with the PKK, a desire to decrease support for the PKK and increase support for moderate Kurdish groups and the AKP.

Reconciliation with PKK

The reforms were widely seen as an attempt to facilitate the peace process with the PKK (Jonathan Burch, 2013) and the surrounding events support this view. On September 9th the PKK reversed its decision to withdraw its fighters from Turkey. The agreement between the PKK and the Turkish government was contingent upon a series of reforms being introduced by the 1st of September. The Turkish government failed to

introduce said reforms which caused the PKK to halt their withdrawal. (Tastekin, 2013). This may have led the Turkish leadership, in fear of the return of violence to Turkey, to rush through the package of reforms that was introduced on the 30th of September. One of the AKP's key policy goals throughout their tenure in Turkey has been democratization and peace in Turkey, and a failure to maintain their progress could have led to a large loss in support at the polls. This method also seems to have met with some success. In recent months, as the divide between Erdogan and Gulen has widened²⁴, the PKK has publicly voiced its support for the AKP party and Erdogan in the dispute (Akyol, 2014).

Support for the AKP

Another possible reason for the implementation of reforms is that the AKP hoped to increase support for itself in Kurdish regions. The Kurds in the past have proven to be a key constituency for the AKP party because of their conservative leanings. According to a study done by the ORG Center, support for the AKP was also dropping at this time amongst Kurds in favor of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) (Kurd Press, 2013). One of the key results of the previously mentioned study was that if peace talks were to be successful between the AKP and the PKK, then support for the BDP would most likely increase. This makes it unlikely that Erdogan expected a rise in support for the AKP, particularly in light of the fact that the 2013 reforms lowered the thresholds for

²⁴ Fetullah Gulen is the leader of a large movement called Hizmet in Turkey which has been responsible for a series of corruption investigations and leaks targeting the AKP regime (Dombey, Gulen calls for new constitution in Turkey, 2014).

party entrance into parliament and campaign funding²⁵ (BBC, 2013).

Kurdish-Liberal-Conservative Alliance

One possibility for the unveiling of these reforms is that Erdogan sought to recreate a Conservative-Liberal-Kurdish Alliance in Turkey (Kemal, 2013). Such an alliance was essential to the AKP party's success in developing Turkey's economy after the AKP came to power. The formation of such an alliance seems unlikely to have influenced the AKP's decision making process for three reasons. First, the large-scale protests held in Gezi Park were mainly driven by liberal secularists and those opposed to liberal economic policies (BBC, 2013) (Azizleri, 2013) who would be unlikely to work with the AKP in a coalition after its handling of the unrest. Second, the new reforms did nothing to assuage the fears of liberal secularists and were likely to inflame tensions between conservatives and secularists because of the lifting of the ban on headscarves²⁶. Third, the AKP has taken an ever more conservative and Islamist approach in recent years. With the removal of the threat of a military coup²⁷, they have complete freedom to act as long as they are able to maintain their popular mandate and a majority in parliament.

Conservative Alliance

A more likely possibility is that Erdogan sought to create a new conservative alliance with the BDP. Though the BDP is considered by some a political arm of the

²⁵ Both are changes that could make it possible for the BDP to compete with the AKP on the national stage.

²⁶ Lifting this ban has been one of the long-term goals of both Erdogan and Islamists within Turkey and has been an extremely contentious issue between secularists and Islamists (BBC, 2013).

²⁷ Erdogan successfully imprisoned a number of officers accused of plotting against his government in "Operation Sledgehammer" (BBC, 2013)

PKK (Idiz, 2013), both groups have given up any stated desire for the independence of the Kurdish regions in Turkey. Rather these groups now only seek increased autonomy. These are goals that the AKP is able to work with and they have shown their commitment to the democratization of eastern Turkey and limited autonomy for the Kurdish people through the reforms which have been implemented. The two parties also have common ground to stand on ideologically because of their constituencies' commitment to (the Turkish version of) Islamic values. The Kurds are, for the most part, conservative and committed to Islamic values, just as the supporters of the AKP party are, (Bahceli & Noel, 2010) and it seems increasingly likely that a conservative alliance composed of the BDP and the AKP will emerge. There is another compelling argument in favor of this being the AKP's goal. As stated earlier, the AKP's support in Kurdish regions was falling at this time²⁸. If Erdogan's goal was only to increase support for the AKP, he would have introduced only the reforms dealing with linguistic and educational reforms. Instead, he also introduced electoral reforms which make it much easier for a Kurdish party to obtain money for and to compete in a national election campaign. Erdogan would not have given the BDP the tools to outcompete him in the East, unless he believed that a partnership between the two was both possible and politically advantageous.

Subsequent Evidence

There are also two pieces of evidence that occurred after the reforms were implemented that seem to show that Erdogan hoped to create this alliance. The first is his ongoing battle with the Gulen movement while the second is his attempts to forge a

²⁸ This is also supported by Cengiz and Hoffman (2013) and Ozkirimli (2013)

closer relationship with the Kurds, and in particular the events he organized in Diraybakir.

Gulen and the Hizmet Movement

There are also a number of events that occurred after the reforms package was introduced that made this conservative alliance between the AKP and Kurdish parties more likely. Shortly after these reforms were implemented, in November of 2013, Erdogan announced plans to shut down private preparation schools in Turkey. This was a move widely speculated to be targeted against Fetullah Gulen, the leader of the Hizmet movement within Turkey (The Economist, 2013). Gulen was up until this time a staunch supporter of the AKP but with this move became one of its greatest enemies using the so-called parallel state²⁹ to investigate many close to the AKP for corruption (Uras, Turkish probe marks AKP-Gulen power struggle, 2013) and releasing evidence that seemed to implicate even Erdogan in corruption (Financial Times, 2014).

In examining Erdogan's decision it is necessary to realize just how pervasive the parallel state was (and may still be) within Turkey. Many members of the judiciary and security services were members of the Hizmet movement (Coskun, 2014) and Erdogan may have felt threatened by their influence. The Kurds on the other hand may not have seemed as threatening and were still conservative and thus a natural ally for Erdogan. It is likely that Erdogan saw them as a partner that would be easier to control. The Hizmet movement was also opposed to expanded Kurdish autonomy or any sort of negotiated peace with the PKK (Wilgenburg, 2013) (Akyol, Is Gulen Movement Against Peace With

²⁹ A number of government officials are followers of the Hizmet movement and supposedly take orders from Gulen. These officials as a whole are called the parallel state (Coskun, 2014).

PKK?, 2013). It is even speculated that the split began over a disagreement over how to approach the peace process in 2012 when a Hizmet official investigated a special negotiator sent to speak with the PKK in secret by Erdogan (Yildiz, 2014). This may have made Erdogan's decision to split with the movement easier because he realized that he would be supported by many Kurds if he did so.

"The Diyarbakir Encounter"

Erdogan's actions after the reforms were implemented also show his commitment to Kurds within Turkey and a possible new alliance with the Kurds. On November 16th of 2013 the Turkish government organized an event to be held in Diyarbakir which is the most important city in Turkish Kurdistan. The event was designed to bring together Turks and Kurds. It was sent out across all of Turkey on public television channels and gave many Turks a glimpse into Kurdish customs as a number of cultural events were broadcast over the course of the event. Another signature event was when a famous Kurdish musician who had been exiled arrived and performed with a famous Turkish artist for all in Turkey to see. Political leaders also contributed to the event with Barzani calling for Turkish and Kurdish brothers to band together while Erdogan used the word Kurdistan, which is the first time a Turkish President or Prime Minister has used that name for the region in public. Another notable action of Erdogan's was to meet with representatives of the BDP party which currently controls the local administration of Diyarbakir (Çandar, 2013) and will likely be able to compete nationally once Erdogan's electoral reforms are fully implemented.

Conclusions

After examining all of the information available, it seems likely that domestic political considerations did have a significant degree of influence on the AKP's decision

to introduce the 2013 reforms. It is likely that after the Gezi Park protests Erdogan realized that courting the liberal-secularists in Turkey would be fruitless, causing him to launch a campaign to create a new conservative alliance. Realizing that they were losing support in Kurdish areas, the AKP decided to introduce laws that would allow Kurdish parties to run on the national level while at the same time cementing themselves as a conservative party opposed to the liberals with the passage of the section lifting the ban on headscarves. The AKP also realized that they needed to pass a package of reforms soon, or risk renewed conflict in the East in addition to the civil unrest already going on in many of Turkey's large cities. It seems likely that this was a calculated political move by Erdogan to ensure his own base stayed with the AKP by lifting the ban on headscarves and placating the PKK while at the same time inviting a renewed BDP to join him on the national stage in a conservative alliance. Erdogan's actions after the reforms were implemented also show where his intentions may have lay. His moves in November to both attack the Hizmet movement and forge a closer relationship with the Kurds show his commitment to a prospective conservative alliance between the AKP and the Kurds.

Relations with Iraqi Kurdistan

Relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan have been improving immensely as the region has gained greater autonomy from the central government of Iraq and asserted its control over energy resources in the North of Iraq. A strategic partnership between the two would prove extremely beneficial for both as it diversifies Turkey's

energy market and allows it to partly fulfill its goal of becoming an energy corridor. At the same time it allows the Kurds in Northern Iraq to sell their energy resources without the need to involve Iraq's federal government (Tol, 2013). It is beneficial to both sides to build a closer relationship, but the questions that need to be answered are whether or not this move would actually help Turkey's relations with Iraqi Kurdistan and whether relations need to be improved in order to fulfill Turkey's geopolitical goals.

This move would undoubtedly buoy Turkish relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) because it will give Kurds within Turkey more freedoms while simultaneously weakening the PKK as Kurds realize they can achieve their goals in the political arena without raising arms. The KRG have often been at odds with one another (Natali, 2013) and Barzani³⁰ will undoubtedly approve of any move that weakens PKK influence.

Though it would increase relations between the KRG and the Turkish government, it is unlikely that the reforms were introduced in order to do so. Relations were already at a point where such a move was unnecessary. The KRG was supporting Turkey against the PKK, (Today's Zaman, 2012) (Rafoglu, 2012) and had already signed energy deals to start shipping resources to Turkey beginning in early 2014 (Tol, 2013). With both of these points in mind it is unlikely that Erdogan would have introduced these reforms solely to foster better relations, though it is a favorable consequence of doing so.

³⁰ Masoud Barzani is the leader of the KRG.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the reasons behind the introduction of the September 2013 package reforms by the AKP. In order to do so it compiled research dealing with two prior periods of reform, one in 2002-2003 and the other in 2009. The research showed that the first period of reform was due to a credible commitment from the European Union to Turkey's accession while the second period was the result of domestic political factors. After examining the events surrounding the 2013 reforms, three possible reasons were found: a credible commitment from the European Union, domestic political factors, and a desire to forge a closer relationship between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. There was not a credible commitment at the time because Germany and France were both opposed to the accession of Turkey to the European Union. The AKP had also showed its unwillingness to curtail itself in order to comply with European norms and, in addition did not have to fight against a wave of popular support for integration in order to do so. It also seemed unlikely that forging a closer relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan was a major reason for the implementation of reforms because relations between Turkey and the aforementioned government were already good. Therefore the most plausible reason for the introduction of these reforms was that Erdogan hoped to form a new conservative alliance between the AKP and Kurdish parties. This is validated by electoral reforms he passed allowing Kurdish parties to compete on the national stage, his subsequent moves against the Hizmet movement and his facilitation of the "Diyarbakir Encounter" which showed his commitment to a closer relationship between the AKP and the Kurds.

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